“BULLIES” WALLPAPER

Artist Virgil Marti created this unusual wallpaper by combining photographs of classmates from his junior high school yearbook with a traditional French fabric design. The French pattern, originally printed in muted browns and beiges, featured horizontal, ornate oval frames that contained peaceful country scenes. Marti changed the look of the fabric completely by replacing the country scenes with photographs, using Day-Glo fluorescent inks, and gluing rayon flock (a layer of fine pieces of fiber) to the black areas. He also turned the ovals to make them vertical and added soft stripes of yellow and red-orange.

Born and raised in Saint Louis, Missouri, Marti now lives and teaches in Philadelphia. He is also a master printer at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, where he handprinted this wallpaper on Tyvek, a synthetic paperlike material also used for mailing envelopes. The mixture of black-and-white portraits in fancy frames surrounded with flowers and Day-Glo colors, as well as the title, “Bullies,” make us pause and think. This work is more than just wallpaper—it has a message.

Marti chose images of classmates from the suburban school he attended who look like “total angels” for the “Bullies” wallpaper because he was intrigued by how much you can tell about a person just from looking at his or her face. This wallpaper raises questions that affect students everywhere: why are some kids bullies? Why are some victims? What is the best response to bullies? Many years after experiencing hurt and anger because of the bullies in his school, Marti found a creative way of expressing his feelings.